



Ecological Support for Refurbishment of Woburn Abbey and Gardens, Bedfordshire

Overview

BSG Ecology has provided ecological survey, planning and licensing support to Bedford Estates to inform the refurbishment of Woburn Abbey and Gardens. The main ecological issue for the project is roosting bats, and BSG has worked closely with Nick Cox Architects, who specialise in the repair and conservation of historic buildings, to reach a solution that enabled the project programme to be met and which will ensure roosting opportunities are sensitively retained and impacts on bats minimised.

Challenge

The project involves the most significant refurbishment of the site since it was opened to the public in 1955, and will include extensive work to the roof of the Abbey, the visitor centre and courtyards. The aim is to update the abbey as a visitor attraction and ensure its preservation for future generations.

Ecological survey of the Abbey and grounds established that the most significant ecological challenge for the project was posed by bat roosts within several of the structures due for renovation. In order to work to the project programme, there was a need to obtain Planning Permission and Listed Building Consent prior to detailed bat surveys being completed; a potentially significant problem.

Solution

To ensure the programme remained on track and avoid costly delays, a series of detailed building inspections were completed (supported by DNA analysis of bat droppings to confirm species). We were then able to draw upon our experience of mitigation for the bat species concerned to inform the detailed designs drawn up by the Architects as part of the relevant submissions.

Once planning consent had been obtained, BSG Ecology proceeded with bat activity surveys during the appropriate season to gather the detailed information required for a European Protected Species Mitigation (EPSM) licence application.

Outcome

The approach to the work has ensured a smooth passage through planning for the project, culminating in the granting of both Planning and Listed Building Consents.

Following the more detailed characterisation of roosts obtained through further survey, we have worked closely with Nick Cox Architects to ensure appropriate mitigation can be delivered despite the design and material constraints associated with listed buildings. A European Protected Species Mitigation licence was secured that enabled works to commence in Spring 2020.

Client Feedback

"Nick Cox Architects have been working with the Bedford Estates at Woburn Abbey over the past 4-5 years to review and develop the masterplan with the aim of improving the visitor's overall experience to Woburn Abbey and its gardens. BSG Ecology were an important member of the consultant team and provided high quality surveys and reports throughout which helped inform the design development and the successful obtaining of the necessary Planning and Listed Building Consents.

Throughout the process, BSG have worked collaboratively with the design team and Bedford Estate to ensure that neither the design nor any habitats were compromised as a result of the planned works. As a result, the consented scheme, once fully implemented, should successfully maintain the important ecological balance of the site and wider park and gardens." Neil Burgess, Architect, Nick Cox Architects.

